

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION EUR-08

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S E C R E T BRUSSELS 06076

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MPOL, MARR, NATO, US, BE
SUBJECT: BELGIAN DELAYS IN RESPONDING TO U.S. REQUESTS

1. WE HAVE HAD THREE CONVERSATIONS ON ABOVE SUBJECTS IN THE LAST FEW DAYS WITH BELGIAN OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR HANDLING MULTI-LATERAL OR BILATERAL ISSUES OF A POLITICO-MILITARY NATURE. MANY OF THESE ARE AND HAVE BEEN PENDING FOR VARYING LENGTHS OF TIME.
2. AS NOTED BRUSSELS 2603, SUCH ISSUES PRESENTLY INCLUDE AWACS, IMPROVED-HAWK, ERW, SHAPE-EUCOM COLLOCATION, LOC, JOINT STORAGE SITES, LTDP'S, STDP'S AND ARMOURED PERSONNEL CARRIER REPLACEMENT.
3. WHILE WE ARE AWARE OF BELGIAN INTERNAL POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND KNOW THAT THE BELGIANS ARE SOMEWHAT OVERLOADED WITH OUR REQUESTS, MANY OF WHICH HAVE COME TO A HEAD RECENTLY, WE PRESSED FOR AN EXPLANATION OF HOW THEY EXPLAINED THEIR OWN DECISION-MAKING PROCESS.

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4. IN RESPONSE, WE WERE TOLD THE FOLLOWING:
(A) ONCE THE MINISTERIAL AD HOC BUDGET REVIEW COMMITTEE (THE AXE COMMITTEE) FINISHED ITS EFFORTS TO FIND THE RESOURCES TO USE TO FILL THE 1978 CURRENT BUDGET SHORTFALL, THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD BE ABLE TO TURN TO THE ISSUES NOTED IN PARA 2 ABOVE. THE AXE COMMITTEE WILL SUBMIT ITS RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE,

CONCEIVABLY WITHIN THE NEXT FORTNIGHT. WHEN IT DOES, THIS WILL
BREAK THE DAM WHICH HAS BEEN HOLDING UP MANY DECISIONS AND PERMIT
YES OR NO ANSWERS.

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(B) THERE ARE TIMES IN THE INTERNAL POLITICAL LIFE OF ALL COUNTRIES,
INCLUDING THE U.S., DURING WHICH GOVERNMENTS FIND THEMSELVES UNABLE
TO ACT DECISIVELY. SUCH IS THE PRESENT CASE IN BELGIUM. THE
BELGIANS

HOPE THEIR ALLIES WILL EXERCISE PATIENCE DURING SUCH PERIODS AND
NOT MISTAKENLY CONCLUDE SUCH A PHENOMENON MEANS A DIMINISHED
INTEREST IN THE COMMON GOALS OF THEIR ALLIANCE PARTNERS.

COMMENT: THIS WAS TOLD US AS A PLEA FOR CONFIDENCE IN BELGIUM AND
FOR CONTINUED PATIENCE, THE NEED FOR WHICH ON THE PART OF THE
USG EMBARRASSES OUR CONTACTS IN THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT AT THE
MOMENT.

(C) LASTLY, WE WERE TOLD THAT THE PROBLEM OF "LEAKS" TO THE PUBLIC
OF SENSITIVE, CONTENTIOUS ISSUES UNDER DISCUSSION COULD LEAD TO
SERIOUS POLITICAL PROBLEMS. SPECIFIC EXAMPLES CITED WERE LEAKS ON
THE ERW ISSUE IN THE U.S. LAST SUMMER AND, MORE RECENTLY, LEAKS IN
THE NETHERLANDS ON A POSSIBLE CHANGE IN AIR DEFENSE TACTICS FROM
A BELT TO A SERIES OF DEFENDED POINTS AND ON THE HANDLING OF THE
ERW ISSUE IN NATO. THE RESULT IS THAT SUCH LEAKS LEND FUEL TO
ANTI-NATO OR NEUTRALIST ELEMENTS IN SOME ALLIED COUNTRIES PRESENTLY
EXPERIENCING POLITICAL WEAKNESS, GIVING THE USSR AN OPPORTUNITY TO
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EXPLOIT THE SITUATION. OUR ATTENTION IN THIS REGARD WAS CALLED
SPECIFICALLY TO THE ERW ISSUE (NOW TEMPORARILY DEFUSED IN BELGIUM -
BRUSSELS 5790). ALONG SAME LINE, ONE BELGIAN SOURCE AGAIN URGED
MAINTENANCE OF SECRECY ON THE COLLOCATION ISSUE (BRUSSELS 5933).

5. COMMENT: WE HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THERE HAS BEEN A
FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN BELGIAN POLITICAL THINKING WHICH WOULD POSE
LONG-TERM PROBLEMS FOR NATO OR THE USG. ON THE OTHER HAND, OUR
ABILITY TO EXTRACT RAPID BELGIAN GOVERNMENT REACTIONS FAVORABLE TO
OUR AIMS HAS CLEARLY DIMINISHED OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS. UNTIL WE
SEE A REASON TO ALTER OUR ANALYSIS OF THE LOCAL SCENE, WE BELIEVE
THAT THE INORDINATE DELAYS WE HAVE RECENTLY ENCOUNTERED ARE
A PASSING PHENOMENON, WHICH WE WILL HAVE TO WAIT OUT WITH PATIENCE
AND SENSITIVITY TO THE TINDEMANS' GOVERNMENT'S INTERNAL
PROBLEMS. CHAMBERS

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